

CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with **PAUL KUNTZLER**

Interviewed by Richard Malsby

Paul Kuntzler was one of the founders of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, the preeminent LGBT political organization in DC, and of a number of other LGBT organizations. He was a Barry supporter in the 1978 campaign, who early forecast Barry's victory. Mayor Barry appointed him to membership on the DC Lottery and games Control Board, on which he served for seven years. He was employed by the National Science Teachers Association until his retirement in 2005.

Date of Interview: August 22, 2015

INTERVIEWER: All right. Would you start off, please, by giving us your name. Spell your first name and your last name.

PAUL KUNTZLER: My name is Paul Kuntzler. Last name is K-u-n-t-z-l-e-r.

INTERVIEWER: And how do you spell Paul?

PAUL KUNTZLER: P-a-u-l.

INTERVIEWER: Very good. Paul, when did you first meet Marion Barry?

PAUL KUNTZLER: I met Marion Barry on a summer evening during 1965, in front of Kann's Department Store, which was then across from the National Archives. I had a part-time job on the first floor of Kann's Department Store, and Marion was head of a group called Free DC, and he and a group of other people were picketing Kann's Department Store because the Board of Trade then opposed home rule.

INTERVIEWER: And what was your conversation with Marion Barry?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, I left Kann's Department Store and I introduced myself to Barry, because I had seen him out front, and I said that I was supportive of what he was doing, even though the people inside were not supportive. And he said that I could be the inside contact on the staff of Kann's Department Store.

INTERVIEWER: So let's go forward to the 1978 campaign. You were, of course, the co-founder of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club which endorsed Marion. What did you, yourself, do in that campaign?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, I was very active in many, many ways. I put up posters on posts all over the city. I was his precinct coordinator in Precinct 128, which was then at Bowen Elementary School on M Street S.W., and I lived then at 745 3rd Street S.W. And as you know, the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club was founded in my living room on a Thursday evening in January of 1976.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you living then, Paul?

PAUL KUNTZLER: At 745 3rd Street S.W.

BETTY KING: May I suggest that you gentlemen may want to identify the Gertrude Stein Club and what it was about?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Okay. The Gertrude Stein Democratic Club was the gay Democratic club in the District of Columbia. My friend, Jim Foster, in San Francisco, the late Jim Foster, founded the Alice B. Toklas Gay Democratic Club in San Francisco, and I was influenced by Jim to use that name. Jim Foster was a delegate to the 1972 Democratic National Convention and also, in 1976, and he was a major gay activist and Democratic Party figure in San Francisco.

INTERVIEWER: So you said you did posters. How did you do your posterings?

PAUL KUNTZLER: We put them up on lampposts, late at night. I remember seeing Ivanhoe Donaldson [campaign manager for Barry in 1978] one night when I was doing that.

INTERVIEWER: And what did he say?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, I think he stopped his car and he said, "Hello, Paul."

INTERVIEWER: But you really used a ladder to get them—

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, or—I don't think we used a ladder. I got up and, you know, I put them up and then I was staple them and then push the next one up, and that's the way I did it.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. All right. Tell us about this map that you created after the campaign, after Marion won the primary in 1978.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, after Marion, he won the election on Tuesday, September 12, 1978. Now, as you remember, there was a restaurant at Connecticut and R, which is across from La Tomate [restaurant]. It's now the Church of Scientology office, where the Reverend Susan Taylor, who is President of the Church of Scientology, has her office. Anyways, you were there waiting for me, and I told you that Marion was leading by 500 votes, and you were quite surprised because the expectation then was that Marion was going to run third behind Sterling Tucker, who was Chairman of the City Council, and [incumbent] Mayor Walter Washington. On Saturday, September 9, 1978, Milton Coleman wrote a story in the *Washington Post*. The

caption was "Gays hope to cast deciding votes for Barry." And then, of course, he [Barry] ultimately won the election by somewhat more than 1,500 votes.

Now, at the first Stein meeting after Barry won the election, I did a presentation at the Stein meeting, showing a precinct map of all the precincts in the District of Columbia. There were about 20 precincts where there were a significant number of gay men and lesbians living. In those precincts, Barry had from 50 to 65 percent of the vote. In all the other precincts, Marion ran a distant third.

INTERVIEWER: Did you actually create a map for this presentation?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes. I presented a map that evening.

INTERVIEWER: At the meeting.

PAUL KUNTZLER: At the meeting, and Betty King was there.

INTERVIEWER: Representing the campaign.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Representing the campaign.

INTERVIEWER: Now how did this end up in the *Washington Post*?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, I believe you and I had a luncheon meeting with Milton Coleman, who was the *Washington Post* writer for the district.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall where that lunch was?

PAUL KUNTZLER: No, I do not.

INTERVIEWER: I, Richard Maulsby, recall that lunch. It was at the Eagle [a gay restaurant].

PAUL KUNTZLER: Oh, the Eagle on 9th?

INTERVIEWER: No, the Eagle.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, the Saturday before, that Saturday, September 9—

INTERVIEWER: Well, we're now talking about the map at the lunch meeting with Milton Coleman, after the election, when you presented to him what you had presented at the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes. I do want to say that Marion, he made an appearance that Saturday night at the Eagle, which is on 9th Street, and we had a luncheon at the Eagle, with Milton

Coleman, and I made a presentation to him, and he wrote this story that appeared on Saturday, when I was in Boston. I guess it was in late September of 1978, because I was in Boston when the story appeared, and I'd gotten the *Washington Post*. I guess I knew it was going to appear. [Kuntzler corrected this, saying the map was in the *Post* in April 1979].

INTERVIEWER: And did the story appear with the map you had created?

PAUL KUNTZLER: The map appeared in the *Washington Post*. It was printed in the *Post*.

INTERVIEWER: So you would say that, literally, the election put us on the map.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, it did. It really did. Of course, we had begun to develop political influence in the aftermath of Frank Kameny's campaign for Congress, which was on Tuesday, March 23, 1971. I worked in Precinct 89 that day and we got 11 percent of the vote. In Foggy Bottom we got 8 percent of the vote, and in Dupont Circle we got 5 percent of the vote. All together, Kameny got 1,888 votes and placed fourth, ahead of the Reverend Douglas Moore, who was the Black Power candidate.

INTERVIEWER: Precinct 89—

PAUL KUNTZLER: —which is on Capitol Hill at Hines Junior High School, between 7th and 8th at Pennsylvania Avenue, S.E.

INTERVIEWER: So you're suggesting as early as '71, in those precincts, you were able to identify this is areas where there were gay votes.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, because in the '60s and early '70s, the gay community was concentrated primarily on Capitol Hill, but that's where the greatest concentration of gay men and lesbians were, where they lived in the '60s and early '70s.

INTERVIEWER: So looking back on it now, to what extent do you think the city is different today, different in terms of the gay and lesbian community, because of that '78 election? What did that mean? How are things different as opposed to, say, if Sterling Tucker would have won, or Walter Washington would have won?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, the gay and lesbian community has now a significant political influence. We are assimilated, though, into the culture, here in D.C., and everybody seeks our support when they run for office.

INTERVIEWER: But in terms of Marion being elected, what do you feel was the personal impact of that election on the gay community?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, during his first term, he appointed more gay men and lesbians to jobs on boards and commissions than any other elected official combined in the United States.

INTERVIEWER: And were you appointed by the mayor to something?

PAUL KUNTZLER: I was appointed by Marion Barry to the D.C. Lottery and Charitable Gains Control Board, and then reappointed by Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly.

INTERVIEWER: You've been involved in a lot of elections over the years.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Correct.

INTERVIEWER: How does '78 stand out in your mind compared to all the other things that you've been involved in politically?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, it was very politically significant in terms of the gay community because in the aftermath of that election, the larger political community recognized that the gay community was politically important. Now, I got appointed by Marion Barry to the District Democratic State Committee and then I ran in Ward 2, and then, in 1980, I was elected and again in 1984, and I was the first openly gay person to serve on the D.C. Democratic State Committee.

INTERVIEWER: What was it like being a gay person, when you first came to Washington and on into the '70s, and going into the '78 election?

PAUL KUNTZLER: I first came to Washington at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, January 18, 1961, for John Kennedy's inauguration. I met some young gay men in Dupont Circle, went to my first gay party, at 1731 New Hampshire Avenue, which was then an apartment building. It's now the Carlisle Suites and Hotel. And I came back in June of 1961, stayed at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel for a week and then I flew back on United Airlines, stayed at the Statler Hilton, which is now the Capital Hilton, and then I moved to Washington on Thursday, December 28, 1961. I had just turned 20.

At that time, there was a total prohibition of gay men and lesbians working in both the federal and district government. We were denied security clearances for government-related jobs and the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental illness.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first become aware of Marion Barry, politically, as a political force? You had met him, obviously, early on during his Free DC activist phase, but in terms of a political force in the city, when did you first become aware of him?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, he was initially a member of the school board, if you remember that, before he became a member of the City Council. In April of 1971, I was one of the six founders of Gay Activists Alliance, along with Clifton Witt, Joel Martin, David Livingston, Jim McClard, and Joel Martin. It's now called Gay and Lesbian Activists Alliance [GLAA].

I will say this. On Tuesday evening, March 6, 1962, I became the 17th member of the Mattachine Society of Washington, the district's first gay rights group, and the GLAA is now the oldest surviving gay rights organization in North America.

INTERVIEWER: And the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club is the—

PAUL KUNTZLER: —the oldest surviving gay democratic club in North America.

INTERVIEWER: And in looking at the '78 election, three candidates, was there any doubt in your mind that the Gertrude Stein club should support Marion Barry as opposed to the other two?

PAUL KUNTZLER: I believe that we were very enthusiastic about Marion Barry in 1978. We endorsed Marion Barry. You were president at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Why was there such enthusiasm, though, for Marion Barry?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Because he actively and publicly solicited our support, where [City Council Chairman] Sterling Tucker was like behind the scenes.

INTERVIEWER: What about [incumbent Mayor] Walter Washington? Did you not have a role in—

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, I did. I attended different meetings with the late Walter Washington. I remember coming back from Philadelphia in March of 1976, because I was on the staff of National Science Teachers Association, and I was attending the NSTA national convention in Philadelphia. We met, I remember, with Mayor Walter Washington at the District Building. I remember him saying, "This is quite a delegation." [Laughs] And I saw Walter Washington a number of times. When there was the great fire at the Follies Film Club, he arrived to see what was happening. About nine men died in that fire.

INTERVIEWER: And you were there?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yeah, I was there, and I unfortunately got interviewed by this reporter from the *Washington Post* who was very green.

INTERVIEWER: Ah. Well, that was a very tragic event.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, I know.

INTERVIEWER: People lost their lives.

PAUL KUNTZLER: And as you know, he reported on the front page of the *Washington Post* that I referred to my late partner as my lover, which Steven [Miller] was furious about that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Is there anything else about the '78 campaign that stands out in your mind? What do you think were the keys to Marion's victory in 1978?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, the *Washington Post* ran an editorial campaign. He had significant support in the Caucasian community, in addition to the gay and lesbian vote. He was perceived as the liberal activist, of the three candidates, Walter Washington and Sterling Tucker, and he ran very big here in Ward 3, as you know, Betty. So it was very significant. Steve and I went to his inaugural ball—and I have a photograph of that—in January of 1979.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think was the most significant contribution that the gay community made to Barry in '78? I mean, obviously the vote in those key precincts, as you point out, but in terms of what practical value do you believe the gay community brought to the campaign in '78?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, we provided a lot of workers, the Stein Club, for his campaign. We also made financial contributions to his campaign, which I did also. And I know we produced a flyer—I can remember it now—with photos and the identification of various political people, including—Don Culver and Bill Bickford, who owned the Lost & Found--

INTERVIEWER: Which was—

PAUL KUNTZLER: —a gay club on L Street S.E.

INTERVIEWER: Down by what is now the baseball district.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yeah, near the baseball stadium. Correct. I think I put together that flyer that we distributed in the gay bars, and there were pictures of all the people who were prominent in the gay community.

INTERVIEWER: Very good. So is there anything else you want to say about Marion Barry, about the '78 campaign, just sort of summing it all up?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Well, we were very proud of the fact that we had played a significant role. The late Joseph Rauh, who was a prominent attorney and a prominent member of Americans for Democratic Action, told me that we had elected Marion Barry.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, he did?

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yes, because he was on the delegation to the 1980 Democratic Convention with me, and he was a very famous attorney.

INTERVIEWER: Very big in the Civil Rights Movement.

PAUL KUNTZLER: Yeah, and Americans for Democratic Action, which Eleanor Roosevelt founded in the late '40s. And I was the first openly gay chapter chairman of ADA in January of 1977.

INTERVIEWER: Very good.